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Activities of the Commission on Sustainable Development and their possible implications for the work of the Statistical Commission

Note by the Secretary-General

The present note, which was prepared at the request of the Economic and Social Council, reports on decisions of the Commission on Sustainable Development and their possible implications with respect to statistics and indicators. The Statistical Commission is invited to take this information into account when considering its provisional agenda and its multi-year programme work.

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I. Summary of recommendations of the Commission on Sustainable Development at its eleventh session on its future programme, organization and methods of work

1. At its eleventh session in 2003, the Commission on Sustainable Development recommended to the Economic and Social Council the adoption of a draft resolution in which the Council, inter alia, would decide that, in order to fulfil its mandate, the Commission's multi-year programme of work for the period after 2003 would be organized in a series of two-year action-oriented implementation cycles, with each cycle focusing on selected thematic clusters of issues. At its substantive session of 2003, the Council adopted the draft resolution (see Council resolution 2003/61 of 25 July 2003).

2. The cycles will include a review year (session) and a policy year (session) and will address the thematic clusters of issues in an integrated manner, taking into account economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Means of implementation, including **information for decision-making**, as well as other cross-cutting issues, should be addressed in each cycle with regard to the selected thematic cluster of issues.

3. The **review sessions** will undertake an evaluation of progress in implementing Agenda 21,[1] the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21[2] and the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg Plan of Implementation),[3] while focusing on identifying constraints and obstacles in the process of implementation with regard to the selected thematic cluster of issues for the cycle. Evaluation of progress will be based on information provided in country reports and reports of United Nations organizations and bodies, and on information from regions and subregions, as well as major groups. The evaluation should enable an improved understanding of priority concerns in implementation with respect to the selected thematic cluster of issues and facilitate an effective policy discussion during the **policy sessions** with a view to strengthening implementation.

4. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2003/61, emphasized that an effective reporting system is essential for reviewing, evaluating and monitoring progress in implementation. It encouraged countries to present national reports and to advance work on indicators for sustainable development at the national level. Reporting to the Commission should reflect the overall progress made on the three dimensions of sustainable development, focusing on the thematic cluster of issues for the cycle, and should include aspects from all levels (national, subregional, regional and global). Existing reporting systems should be used to the fullest extent possible and effective use should be made of the indicators of sustainable development.

5. The secretariat of the Commission on Sustainable Development was requested, working in close cooperation with other organizations in the United Nations system, to:

(a) Streamline reporting to avoid duplication and unnecessary burdens on countries;

(b) Provide focused information that highlighted trends, constraints, challenges and emerging issues;

(c) Provide technical assistance to countries, upon their request, in national reporting.

II. Multi-year programme of work of the Commission on Sustainable Development (2004/2005-2016/2017)

6. The multi-year programme of work of the Commission on Sustainable Development is set out below:

Cycle	*Thematic cluster*	*Cross-cutting issues*
2004/2005	• Water • Sanitation • Human settlements	Poverty eradication; changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production; protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development; sustainable development in a globalizing world; health and sustainable development; sustainable development of small island development States; sustainable development for Africa; other regional initiatives; means of implementation; institutional framework for sustainable development; gender equality; and education
2006/2007	• Energy for sustainable development • Industrial development • Air pollution/atmosphere • Climate change	Poverty eradication; changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production; protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development; sustainable development in a globalizing world; health and sustainable development; sustainable development of small island developing States; sustainable development for Africa; other regional initiatives; means of implementation; institutional framework for sustainable development; gender equality; and education
2008/2009	• Agriculture • Rural development • Land • Drought • Desertification • Africa	Poverty eradication; changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production; protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development; sustainable development in a globalizing world; health and sustainable development; sustainable development of small island developing States; sustainable development for Africa; other regional initiatives; means of implementation; institutional framework for sustainable development; gender equality; and education

Cycle	*Thematic cluster*	*Cross-cutting issues*
2010/2011[a]	• Transport • Chemicals • Waste management • Mining • A 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns	Poverty eradication; changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production; protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development; sustainable development in a globalizing world; health and sustainable development; sustainable development of small island developing States; sustainable development for Africa; other regional initiatives; means of implementation; institutional framework for sustainable development; gender equality; and education
2012/2013[a]	• Forests • Biodiversity • Biotechnology • Tourism • Mountains	Poverty eradication; changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production; protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development; sustainable development in a globalizing world; health and sustainable development; sustainable development of small island developing States; sustainable development for Africa; other regional initiatives; means of implementation; institutional framework for sustainable development; gender equality; and education
2014/2015[a]	• Oceans and seas • Marine resources • Small island developing States • Disaster management and vulnerability	Poverty eradication; changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production; protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development; sustainable development in a globalizing world; health and sustainable development; sustainable development of small island developing States; sustainable development for Africa; other regional initiatives; means of implementation; institutional framework for sustainable development; gender equality; and education

Cycle	*Thematic cluster*	*Cross-cutting issues*
2016/2017	Overall appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation	

[*] These thematic clusters will remain as part of the multi-year programme of work as scheduled, unless otherwise agreed by the Commission (applies to the clusters for 2010/2011, 2012/2013 and 2014/2015).

7. The twelfth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development will be held in New York from 14 to 30 April 2004. The preparatory meeting for the International Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States will be held during the first three days of the session (14-16 April). The review session covering the thematic cluster of water, sanitation and human settlements will be held during the following two weeks of the twelfth session (19-30 April).

III. Implications for the work of the Statistical Commission

A. Integrated environmental and economic accounting

8. The United Nations Statistics Division, as recommended in chapter 8 of Agenda 21, has developed and refined, in cooperation with other international agencies and countries, concepts and methods on environmental-economic accounting. A handbook of national accounting entitled "Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting, 2003" (SEEA 2003) has been issued on the Internet as a "white cover" publication and will be published jointly by the United Nations, the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and the World Bank.

9. The SEEA is a satellite system of the System of National Accounts, 1993 (1993 SNA),[4] that brings together economic and environmental information in a common framework to measure the contribution of the environment to the economy and the impact of the economy on the environment. It represents a major step towards standardizing and harmonizing concepts, definitions and methods and in providing policy makers with a consistent set of indicators and descriptive statistics to monitor these interactions. Statistics collected in this framework constitute a database for strategic planning and policy analysis directed towards identifying more sustainable paths of development.

10. The United Nations Statistics Division, the Division for Sustainable Development of the United Nations Secretariat and the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) have also been active in the development of an information system for water resources as a tool for integrated water resources management. The draft handbook on "Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting for Water Resources" (SEEAW), which integrates economic information

and hydrologic information on water resources, uses concepts, definitions and classifications of the conventional accounts without violating the fundamental concepts of hydrology. This integration facilitates the consideration of water issues within mainstream economic decision-making and the evaluation of the impacts of economic policies on water resources and of water policies on the economy. With additional socio-economic data that can be integrated in the framework, SEEAW allows for the derivation of a consistent set of indicators covering the economic, environmental and social sphere, which are precisely defined and interlinked with each other, as they are derived from a fully consistent data system. Moreover, more in-depth analysis through scenario modelling and projections is also possible.

11. The United Nations Statistics Division and the Division for Sustainable Development have also worked towards the standardization of terms and definitions related to water accounting through the establishment of an electronic discussion group which has been announced to experts in hydrology, statistics, national accounting and policy-making in international agencies and national offices. This exercise is very timely, as the need for standardizing concepts, definitions and classifications in respect of water as a first step towards improving data quality and reliability at the national and international levels has been widely recognized.

12. Recently, the United Nations Statistics Division and the Division for Sustainable Development have launched a project on the implementation of water accounting as a tool for integrated water resources management in Morocco. The project will implement the accounts at the river-basin level in all river basins of Morocco and integrate the results at the national level within the national accounts. The ongoing experience of the Morocco case study has already shown that the water accounting framework can be used by the various agencies as a tool for exchanging information among the various stakeholders and for creating a common integrated data system related to water. This experience could pave the way for true collaborative United Nations support to developing countries in building their own capacities for establishing a relevant and consistent integrated data system on water within the framework of the water accounting.

B. Environmental statistics and indicators

13. The Commission on Sustainable Development at its eleventh session redefined the need for the development of environment statistics and indicators by emphasizing that an effective reporting system is essential for reviewing, evaluating and monitoring progress in implementation towards environmental sustainability at the national, regional and international levels. Environment statistics is among the youngest and least developed areas of statistics. The work programme of the United Nations Statistics Division aims at the establishment and continuous improvement of regular reporting, supported by methodological development and training/capacity-building in environment statistics. This programme can accommodate and support the multi-year work programme of the Commission on Sustainable Development by maintaining a similar thematic focus.

14. The significance of training and capacity-building at the national/regional level, and the need for streamlining international data demands, as well as the need for the development of standard methodologies in this area, call for a strengthened collaboration of the international organizations engaged in environment

statistics/information. The establishment of the Inter-agency Working Group on Environment Statistics is envisaged as a major step towards more efficient use of resources and a more effective sharing of work among international organizations in the development of environment statistics.

C. Millennium Development Goals indicators

15. The recommendations of the Inter-agency and Expert Meeting on Millennium Development Goals Indicators (Geneva, November 2003) provided a working schedule geared towards the completion in the summer of 2005 of the Secretary-General's comprehensive report on the monitoring of the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration.[5] In the meantime, harmonization of the Millennium Development Goals indicators on environmental sustainability and the indicators that monitor the implementation of the targets adopted by the World Summit on Sustainable Development, and improvement of their statistical base, were identified as an area where work is most urgently needed. Improving the framework and selection of indicators on the environment, and improving national capacities to compile these indicators will be the subject of an Inter-agency and Expert Meeting on Millennium Development Goals Indicators in 2004.

IV. Points for action by the Statistical Commission

16. The Statistical Commission is invited to comment on the statistical implications of the multi-year work programme of the Commission on Sustainable Development as outlined in the present note.

Notes

[1] *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992*, vol. I, *Resolutions Adopted by the Conference* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex II.

[2] General Assembly resolution S-19/2, annex.

[3] *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August-4 September 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.03.II.A.1 and corrigendum), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.

[4] Commission of the European Communities, International Monetary Fund, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, United Nations and World Bank, *System of National Accounts, 1993* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.94.XVII.4).

[5] See General Assembly resolution 55/2.